Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement:
Issues, Ideas, and Insights

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Session Chair: Patty Williams, PhD, PDt
Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security
Mount Saint Vincent University

On behalf of Partners of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project of the NS Food Security Network, CURA Activating Change Together for Community Food Security and the Atlantic Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network
Overview

- *Setting the stage*: Insights, ideas, and issues
- Explore Small group discussions
What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

• Within a critical framework

• Four pillars: collaboration, mutual learning, action / change, and research.

• Incorporates diverse perspectives
NS Participatory Food Costing Model

**Purpose:** To help build capacity food security for all Nova Scotians using participatory approaches to examine and address the accessibility of a nutritious diet.

**Objectives:**
- To engage individuals and mobilize communities towards knowledge and skill development to improve food security
- To collect and critically analyze evidence about factors that affect the accessibility of a nutritious diet
- To share the evidence by creating effective communications mechanisms
- To inform and support healthy public policy development
Community-University Research Alliance (CURA): Activating Change Together (ACT) for Community Food Security

Aims to *enhance community food security* for all Nova Scotians.

Rooted in *lived* experiences, *real community needs* and innovative solutions...

...it amplifies and broadens conversation, research, and action to strengthen capacity for policy change.
The Social Economy and Sustainability (SES) Research Network: Sub-node 3

One of six research clusters of SES Network with focus on CFS.

To support Participatory Action Research that:
- is driven, guided and approved by SES Project community partners;
- involves an element of university - community collaboration;
- contributes to building food security at multiple levels and with diverse groups;
- benefits the social economy in Hants, Kings and Annapolis Counties; and
- has relevance to/impacts on the wider social economy.
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Knowledge Mobilization

Christine Johnson¹, Dr. Doris Gillis ¹ & Rita MacAulay²

1: St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish NS
2: Capital District Health Authority, Halifax NS
What is Knowledge Mobilization (KM)?

• Evolving understanding of KM is emerging through practice
• Little in reported literature
• Concept central to collaborative & participatory approaches
  • Embedded as focal process within *ACT for Community Food Security*
Knowledge Mobilization – Working Definition

...the process of getting knowledge into active service in the broader society based on a multi-dimensional and long-term research scale; it is political in nature, working to influence decision making and policy by getting the right information to the right people in the right format at the right time.

Felt et al. 2004; Jacobson et al. 2007; Levin 2008; ONF 2009
What Knowledge?

**Instrumental:** evidence-based, created by ‘experts’

**Critical:** challenge assumptions, critically analyze & appraise information, emphasize social change

**Interactive:** developing understanding, encompasses lived experience through dialogue

Ways of Knowing & Knowledge Mobilization
Opportunities

• **Aligns** with PAR principles & best practices for building capacity for CFS

• **Enables** use of knowledge to inform policy change for CFS

• **Encourages** attention to power relations embedded in knowledge creation & sharing

• **Shares & expands** our learnings about KM & CFS/policy change

• **Contributes** to emerging literature, future research & practice
Challenges

• Understanding Knowledge Mobilization in PAR

• Framing the work (conceptualization)
  • Scope of *ACT for Community Food Security*
  • Drawing boundaries between KM & communication

• Critical to start at the beginning

• Learning from/being responsive to needs of the project

• Evaluation
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Advocacy

Cynthia Watt, Heather Hunter, & Patty Williams
On behalf of the NS Participatory Food Costing Working Group
NS Participatory Food Costing Project, Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security, Mount Saint Vincent University
Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project

• Food costing has been conducted across the province in 2002, 2004/05, 2007/08, and 2010.

• Engages individuals most affected by the issue of food insecurity
  • Data collection
  • Knowledge sharing

• Generates info on the cost and affordability of a basic nutritious diet – can be used to inform policy change (i.e. increases to minimum wage and income assistance rates)
Opportunities for Advocacy

Food Studies Research:

- PAR approaches: bring “voice” and experience to research (i.e., story sharing).
- Participatory Food Costing Project – proposes a model for meaningful involvement/engagement of people experiencing food insecurity in food costing research.
Opportunities for Advocacy

Broader food movement:

• Participatory Action Research approach creates opportunities for self-advocacy
• Share knowledge and influence public opinion via media outlets
• Influence policy change
Facing some tough choices

Many Nova Scotians can't afford to eat nutritious, food costing report says

Province Announces New Support for Nova Scotia Families

Published by the Premier's Office
Thursday, April 7, 2011

About $40,000 Nova Scotia families will soon have more money to make ends meet thanks to new support announced by Premier Darrell Dexter. The province will invest more than $15 million over the next year to help low-income families regain their independence and pay for family priorities.

Quotes

"This is the largest investment in Nova Scotia families and children in a decade. Raising strong, healthy children is key to Nova Scotia's social and economic future. We're working hard to protect the health of families. We are making this province on a new path forward and within our means.

Premier Darrell Dexter"

"Families are our priority, which is why we're making investments while other provinces and countries are cutting social programs. Investing in Nova Scotia families helps them provide for themselves, and contribute to their communities and the province's economy."

Government of Nova Scotia | gov.ns.ca
Advocacy Challenges

Varying public opinion around poverty and food insecurity.

“Choises??

Mother of four says it all doesn't it? Like the saying goes, if you can't afford children then don't have them. Why not go after the fathers of these kids?? Get them to pay child support and stop expecting the taxpayer to keep throwing $$$ at you. Half my pay is lost to the taxman to keep the welfare crowd comfortable while at the same time I have my own family to raise and struggle with bills to pay. Remember it's the middle income worker that foots the bill for all these programs, and right now we are the ones overtaxed and trying to get by. Where's my break??”

(Online response to Food Costing media release story in The Chronicle Herald)
Advocacy Challenges

- Giving Voice vs. Exploitation
- Power differences.
  - Risks vs. benefits for researchers and food costers when going public.
- Communicating complex issues in ways that resonate
  - Framed as a societal issue, not just individual ones
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Policy Change

Debbie Reimer\textsuperscript{1}, MSW, RSW, Patty Williams, Lynn Langille\textsuperscript{2}

1: Kids Action Program and Apple Tree Landing, Canning, NS
2: Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
Policy Change

To build Community Food Security, we need to influence policy.
Influencing Policy Change

- Participatory Action Research builds processes around sharing knowledge long term.
- Ensures support for building policy over time.
- Informs and creates policy change.
- Identifies and evaluates processes regarding impact on policy.

... and social change!
Personal Policy

Opportunities

- Challenging personal policy encourages individuals to challenge other kinds of policy
  - Results in influencing food movement as an individual.
- PAR gives voice to personal policy

Challenges

- Involves struggle and resistance all the time – never stop working!
- Makes the personal political.
- Personal dilemma: lack of personal choice.
Organizational Policy

Opportunity
• Important to have leadership.
• If you aren’t the leader, you need to influence that leadership.
• Educate more people around the issues, why the policy is important, and to showcase the possibilities.

Challenge
• Always receive opposition within the organization.
• Working with families who are marginalized, results in constant justification – e.g., “You take what you get, if you’re poor!”
• Takes a long time to change: importance of process & time.
  • Can lose people and organizations
Public Policy

Opportunity
- Brings voices of marginalized individuals to the table.
  - Involves community in a meaningful way (not just a token person).
- Better policy: those living the experience involved in policy recommendations.
- Part of something bigger. People see things happening, because the connection continues.

Challenge
- Hard to keep people involved.
- Support for real contribution and co-creation.
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Ethical Challenges and Opportunities

Patty Williams¹, Barb Anderson² & Samantha Cohen²

1: Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS,
2: Acadia University, Wolfville, NS, Education & Training Working Group Host Institution
Ethical Challenges & Tensions

- Trust and respect\(^1\)
- Power and control\(^2\)
- Differences in perspective, priorities, assumptions, values, beliefs, and language\(^3\)
- Conflicts over funding\(^4\)
- Tasks vs. processes\(^5\)

1:Bastida et al., 2010; Maiter et al, 2008; Minkler, 2004; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
2:Jacobs, 2010; Ross et al, 2010; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
3:Edwards et al., 2008; Minkler, 2004; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
4:Flicker et al., 2007; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
5:Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
Ethical Challenges & Tensions

- Time-consuming processes
  - When does “research” begin?
- Who represents the community and how is the community defined?
- Inability to fully specify all aspects of research up-front
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Data ownership and dissemination

6: Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
7: Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Maiter et al., 2008; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
8: Boser, 2006; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006
9: Boser, 2006; Reid & Brief, 2009
10: Flicker et al., 2007; Khanlou & Peter, 2005
Opportunities: Researchers

- Informed consent as an opportunity for dialogue ¹¹
- Protocols to ensure privacy/confidentiality ¹²
- Community involvement ¹³
- Protocols guiding data ownership & disclosure ¹⁴
- Balancing harms and benefits ¹⁵

¹¹: Edwards, Lund, & Gibson, 2008; Flicker et al., 2007
¹²: Edwards et al., 2008
¹³: Macaulay et al., 1998
¹⁴: Bastida et al., 2010; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007
¹⁵: Flicker et al., 2007
Opportunities: Ethics Boards

• Familiarity with PAR/CBPR 16
• Alternate ways of addressing the issues covered by current protocol forms 17
• Concern with action outcomes 18
• Revisiting ethical concerns once approval is granted 19
• Need for training/education and communication tools 20

16: Downie & Cottrell, 2001
17: Downie & Cottrell, 2001; Guta, et al., 2010
18: Flicker et al., 2007
19: Downie & Cottrell, 2001
20: Interview, 2011
Opportunities for the Food Movement

- Community and university partnerships
- Strengthened capacity for PAR projects
- Better integration of diverse perspectives and ways of working
- Lessen disparities in food and nutrition resources
- Inform and strengthen practice and policy
Discussion Questions

What resonates with you from the sharing this morning? (What is giving you pause or making you uncomfortable? What is making you excited?)

What specific ideas or actions can you apply to your own way of working in the short term? In the long term?
Thank You!
For More Information...

Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security
www.foodsecurityresearchcentre.ca

www.foodthoughtful.ca

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